

of arms, totally unacquainted with every kind of military skill, which (being followed by want of confidence in themselves when opposed to troops regularly trained, disciplined, and appointed, superior in knowledge and superior in arms) makes them timid and ready to fly from their own shadows.

Besides, the sudden change in their manner of living (particularly in the lodging) brings on sickness in many, impatience in all, and such an unconquerable desire of returning to their respective homes that it not only produces shameful and scandalous desertions among themselves, but infuses the like spirit in others.

Again, men accustomed to unbounded freedom and no control cannot brook the restraint which is indispensably necessary to the good order and government of an army, without which licentiousness and every kind of disorder triumphantly reign. . . .

The jealousies [suspicions] of a standing army, and the evils to be apprehended from one, are remote, and, in my judgment, situated and circumstanced as we are, not at all to be dreaded. But the consequence of wanting [lacking] one, according to my ideas formed from the present view of things, is certain and inevitable ruin. For, if I was called upon to declare upon oath whether the militia have been most serviceable or hurtful upon the whole, I should subscribe to the latter.

B. The Formal Break with Britain

1. Thomas Paine Talks Common Sense (1776)

Despite the shooting at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill; despite the British burning of Falmouth (Maine) and Norfolk (Virginia); despite the king's hiring of German (Hessian) mercenaries, the American colonists professed to be fighting merely for reconciliation. But killing redcoats with one hand and waving the olive branch with the other seemed ridiculous to Thomas Paine, a thirty-nine-year-old agitator from England who had arrived in Philadelphia about a year earlier. Of humble birth, impoverished, largely self-educated, and early apprenticed to a corset maker, he was a born rebel who had failed at various undertakings. But he rocketed to fame with a forty-seven-page pamphlet published in January 1776 under the title Common Sense. Selling the incredible total of 120,000 copies in three months, it sharply accelerated the drift toward independence. Paine urged an immediate break, not only to secure foreign assistance but also to fulfill America's moral mandate from the world. Were his views on mercantilism, isolationism, and reconciliation reasonable? Did his arguments appeal more to passion or to logic?

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: . . .

I have heard it asserted by some that, as America has flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her fu-

¹Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), pp. 84–101, passim.

ture happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that, because a child has thrived upon milk, it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true. For I answer roundly that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessities of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she [England] has protected us, say some. That she hath engrossed [monopolized] us is true, and defended the continent at our expense, as well as her own, is admitted; and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz. for the sake of trade and dominion. . . .

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savagés make war upon their families; wherefore the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach. But it happens not to be true, or only partly so. . . . Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home pursues their descendants still. . . .

. . . Any submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial [preferential] connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics. . . .

Everything that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature, cries, 'tis time to part. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other was never the design of Heaven. . . .

But if you say, you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover; and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant. . . .

Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual. Our prayers have been rejected with disdain. . . . Wherefore, since nothing but blows will do, for God's sake let us come to a final separation. . . .

Small islands, not capable of protecting themselves, are the proper objects for government to take under their care. But there is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet; and as England and America, with respect

to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe: America to itself. . . .

No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775 [Lexington]. But the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England [George III] for ever; and disdain the wretch that, with the pretended title of Father of his People, can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul. . . .

And in order to show that reconciliation now is a dangerous doctrine, I affirm that it would be policy in the King at this time to repeal the acts, for the sake of reinstating himself in the government of the provinces; in order that *he may accomplish by craft and subtlety in the long run what he cannot do by force and violence in the short one*. Reconciliation and ruin are nearly related. . . .

You that tell us of harmony and reconciliation, can you restore to us the time that is past? Can you give to prostitution its former innocence? Neither can you reconcile Britain and America. . . . There are injuries which nature cannot forgive; she would cease to be nature if she did. As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress as the continent forgive the murders of Britain. The Almighty hath implanted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes. . . . They distinguish us from the herd of common animals. . . .

O! you that love mankind! You that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

2. Richard Henry Lee's Resolution of Independence (1776)

Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, one of the earliest advocates of a complete break, proposed the following three resolutions in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia on June 7, 1776. After a spirited debate, the first one was approved on July 2 by the representatives of twelve states. This was in fact the original "declaration" of independence; and John Adams wrote his wife that the day would thereafter be observed by future generations as the great anniversary festival, with fireworks and other manifestations of joy. But he miscalculated by two days. Why was this resolution for independence less memorable than Jefferson's historic document, which follows?

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign alliances.

²W. C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress* (1906), vol. 5, p. 425.

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.

3. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence (1776)

Lee's immortal resolution of independence, passed on July 2, formally cut all ties with Britain. But so momentous a step could not be taken without a convincing explanation, partly in the hope of eliciting foreign sympathy and military aid. The Continental Congress had appointed a committee to prepare such an appeal, and the tall, sandy-haired Thomas Jefferson, then only thirty-three years old, was named chief draftsman. The Declaration (Explanation) of Independence, formally adopted on July 4, 1776, contained little new. It embodied the doctrine of natural rights and John Locke's ancient "compact theory" of government, as well as a formidable and partisan list of grievances, as though from a prosecuting attorney. But the language of the Declaration was so incisive and eloquent that this subversive document—designed primarily to subvert British rule—was magnificently successful. What persons or groups of persons are blamed, and which one is blamed the most? Does Jefferson offer any hint that the colonists themselves were partly at fault?

[I]

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government.

³W. C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress* (1906), vol. 5, pp. 510–515.

[II]

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained, and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the mean time, exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population [populating] of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone for the tenure of their offices and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in time of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.

[III]

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction [by Parliament] foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

For imposing taxes on us without our consent;

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses;

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province [Quebec], establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies [a reference to the Quebec Act of 1774];

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

For suspending our own legislatures and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

[IV]

He has abdicated government here by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

[V]

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces [announces] our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

[VI]

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, *free and independent states*; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of

Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that as free and independent states they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

4. The Abortive Slave Trade Indictment (1776)

Farsighted colonists had repeatedly attempted in their local assemblies to restrict or stop the odious African slave trade. But the London government, responding to the anguished cries of British (and New England) slave traders, had killed all such laws with the royal veto—five times in the case of Virginia alone. Jefferson added this grievance to the original indictment, but Congress threw it out, largely because of opposition from those parts of the South heavily dependent on the slave trade. Would this clause have added to the effectiveness of the Declaration of Independence? How, if at all, might its inclusion have changed the subsequent course of human history?

He [George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where *men* should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative [royal veto] for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished dye [might lack no flagrant crime], he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.

C. Voices of Dissent

1. Lord Chatham Assails the War (1777)

Partisan clamor in England between the ruling Tories and the out-of-office Whigs aided the Patriot cause in America. Many British Whigs, partly to embarrass the Tory government, proclaimed that the Americans were merely fighting for British liberties. After the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord, some British Whigs wore mourning out of respect for the colonists who had died. William Pitt, the great organ-

⁴J. H. Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1906), p. 144.

⁵D. J. Brewer, ed., *World's Best Orations* (St. Louis and Chicago: F. P. Kaiser, 1899), vol. 3, pp. 1069–1073.